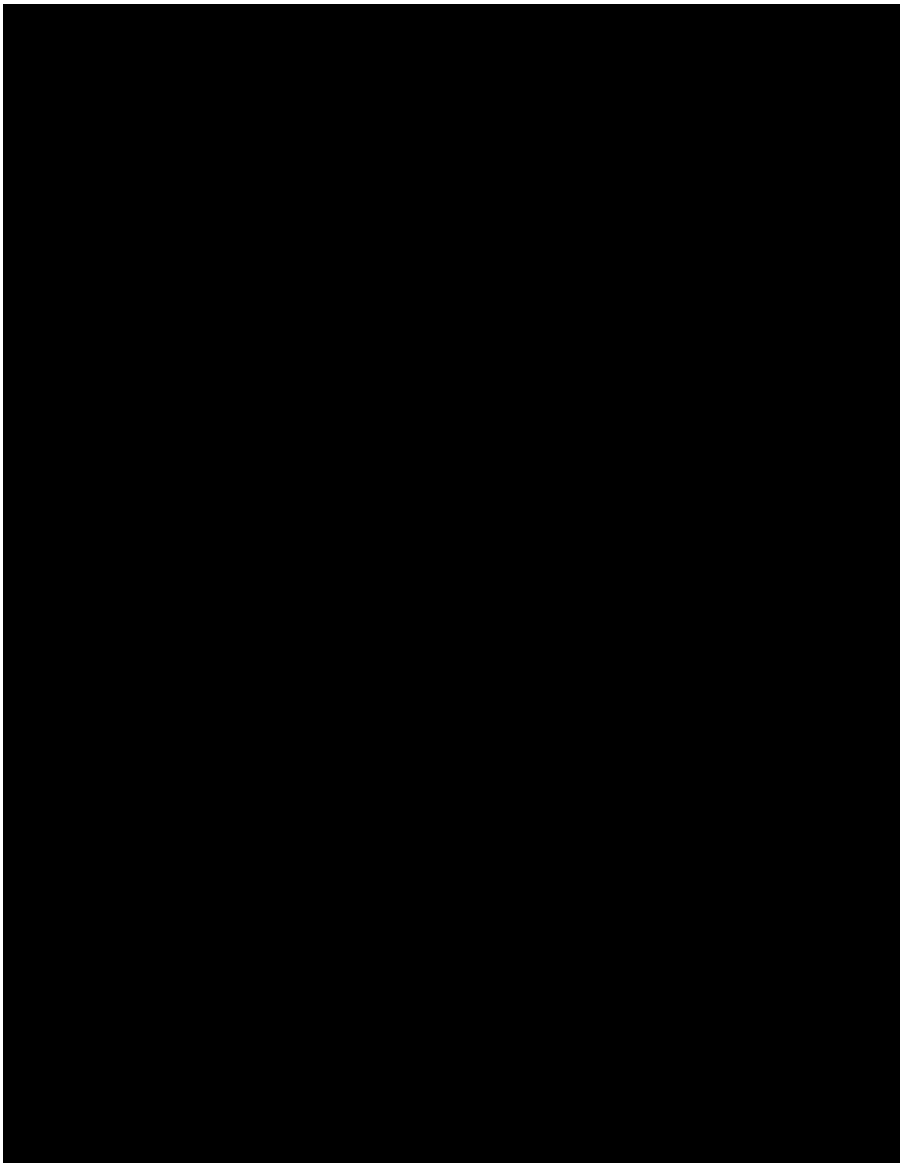
THE FALL TO MADNESS

A. SLAVROS



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Chapter 1

To whom it May Concern

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CHAPTER 1. TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Should you find yourself in possession of this journal, I ask of you that you do not linger at whatever place I will have chosen to hide it. Instead, make your way to a location that you believe will offer you the most safety and security - provided that you are able to understand this text at all.

I am a graduate of a linguistics faculty where I have studied ancient, dead and nearly forgotten languages, and have chosen to transcribe the entirety of my journal in this particular old tongue that I have learned to speak and write in fluently. This is in order to keep my thoughts and observations private from all but those who have shared my interest in this pursuit, which today is considered by most to be pointless and, worse still, boring.

When I left the steps of my university that fateful summer's day, I had no idea that I was about to embark on a journey that would put my life and my very understanding of reality at risk. Hence the warning I've provided on this page. Should you be able to understand these words then please heed them: I know not what to do with the knowledge that I had obtained on my endeavor, and I likewise knew not what to do with this journal other than to hide it away and run for my life, lest they find me. Though I am no longer sure if what they could do to me, should I be caught, can possibly be any worse than what I already have to live with, as that sound will not relent and haunts me even in my sleep. Only now, as I write down my recollection of events that lead me to this point, does the sound subside. But it does not fade completely. Do with this journal and its contents what you will, but know, that they may come for you as well, and perhaps that sound will find you too, and haunt you till your dying day. That is, unless it drives you to madness long before then.

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Chapter 2

It All Began with an

Ancient Tome

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CHAPTER 2. IT ALL BEGAN WITH AN ANCIENT TOME

I had discovered it in a forgotten storage room beneath the university library, which had been locked away for who knows how long. Few people read nowadays, but even the books we see today can't compare to this tome that I had found. It was much thicker than anything printed today, though nearly all the books in this forgotten room seemed to share that quality. Still this particular tome stood out as it felt older than the rest, its cover completely faded and torn, coated in dust that firmly clung to it. The spine barely holding the thick layer of pages within, some were most certainly missing, as when I turned over the cover the page thereafter immediately greeted me with a barrage of mysterious text.

The pages were coated in thick, gray dust around the edges just like the cover. They also had a dark yellow tint to them, and as I turned them over they released a soft crackling noise which made me fear that at any point the page would shatter into tiny pieces, like glass. The text was faded to various de-grees, but where it was more preserved I witnessed an elegant calligraphy of the print that was both beautiful and confusing, as I had never seen anything like it, and despite recognizing the letters, I could not understand their placement.

I was interested in reading some more books written in the language I chose to learn at my faculty, preferably those that were written by those ancient people who spoke it fluently.

My tutor had told me that there was a rumor of this forgotten room that had been passed down by our faculty's professors for generations, perhaps going all the way back to when it was simply common knowledge. Finding this room is a great discovery in of itself, but sadly there are so few people actually interested in this field that uncovering all of the secrets within may take us as at least as many generations as it took to forget of the room's existence. Nevertheless, I was curious to learn more and wanted to help out the university the best I could. Moreover, I wanted to work at the university after my graduation as there were no other places where I could pursue my interest. I've shown the tome to the professors and they concluded

that it was written in an ancient tongue of a distant foreign land. Nobody was quite sure if it even still 6

exists, however. There were records of it and at some point in the past it could be learned at our university, but no more.

The interest in it had died quite a while ago and the last professor to have learned it died during that era, without passing knowledge of the language to anyone else.

We've looked into the deceased professor's old files but they were incomplete, though I doubt that we could have mastered the tongue of the tome all on our own just from some notes. However, we had discovered something that gave us hope for unlocking its mysteries - the professor was looking into possible places where this ancient foreign tongue might still be researched and taught, and apparently discovered rumors of a recluse family that spoke this language fluently. It was no more than a short note with the name of the town where this family apparently lives.

I've talked about this lead with the professors and we have agreed that after graduation, with all my studies done and me officially joining the faculty, I could volunteer to go to this town and locate the family. I would present them the tome and perhaps, with their help, find out its history and learn its content. Possibly even learn the language itself. This project filled me with excitement, making me relive those same sensations I felt when learning my first forgotten language. The prospect of helping out my university also made me feel im-portant and useful.

My excitement and joy only grew over graduation and the celebrations that followed. Better still, I had found myself a partner who agreed to go with me on my journey to the town.

The town in question, as my partner told me, actually hosts a Summer festival, where we could continue celebrating our graduation and have some fun while I conduct my research.

Chapter 3

The Festive Town

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CHAPTER 3. THE FESTIVE TOWN

When I and my partner arrived, the town's Summer festival had already begun, but as it would last for quite a while, people were still busying themselves with the preparations for when the celebrations would take full swing. We signed in at the hostel and met some of the others who were shar-ing the space with us. They assumed we were there for the festival as well, and while my partner eagerly agreed to join them, I explained that my foremost interest was to actually find this recluse family in order to shed light on the mysterious tome and the dead language it was written in. Some of them had a look of utter bewilderment if not outright disdain, some of them rolled their eyes and scoffed that the whole ordeal sounds like a complete bore. I am well used to this dis-missive attitude towards my pursuits by others, as I explained before, since few people at all share such interests nowadays.

Nevertheless I was not so out of sorts as they assumed from my interest - my partner and I gladly agreed to go out with them and explore the town, what it has to offer, and what events will be held for the festival. Life is meant to be lived and that was exactly the point of this festival, so I was only too happy to enjoy myself for now. Besides, this would also give me a chance to talk to some of the townspeople and ask them about the whereabouts of this family.

As we traversed the town and its venues, before leaving a location for another, I'd ask someone about the family I sought. However, the reactions I got were most disconcerting.

Whenever I'd ask someone, it felt as if all the festive joy was immediately sucked right out of them. Their eyes grew fear-ful and most would either try to pretend like they didn't hear me or would stammer that they don't really know what I am talking about. This reaction persisted and at some point I felt as if I was drawing a scar across the town, as each place we'd depart from would be left devoid of the joy it was filled with just before I'd ask my questions. This likewise irked our new friends from the hostel, as they accused me of ruining everyone's mood with my silly pursuit. My curiosity, on the other hand, only grew greater, so much so that I'd immediately ask

the townspeople about this mysterious family at a new venue 10

we'd arrive to, which was finally too much for my partner and our friends who couldn't bear the sudden dark mood that would hang over everyone after my inquiries. They told me that they would continue on without me, so they could pursue what they came for, while leaving me to look for my answers on my own.

To them I had become the harbinger of the dark mood that befell the townsfolk, but I knew that this had to do with the family that everyone was so seemingly afraid to talk about. I would be disappointed in my partner and newfound friends abandoning me, had I not been so completely enthralled with this curious situation which now drove me to prod further. I started talking to random people on the street, only to witness them all have the same look of fear in their eyes, just before they'd avert their gaze and try to walk past me without a word or with some mumbled excuse. This would continue further and my curiosity had become an obsession, but to no avail. I grew tired and visited a local vendor to get myself something to drink and once I quenched my thirst I decided to prod the owner with my questions.

Now, however, the reaction was different. The joyous festive attitude was still gone without a trace and the vendors eyes were also filled with fear, but that was not all, they conveyed concern and caution. The vendor fidgeted in place a bit and coughed, looking down to the counter momentarily, then right back up at me and asked why I wanted to know.

I explained the goals of my endeavor, and the vendor grew quiet, before telling me that I should drop the whole thing, that getting involved with this family over some dead language nobody cared about was dangerous. Of course the vendor thought my interest to be pointless and dull, yet made a much bigger emphasis on the apparent dangers ahead of me that I was unaware of. "No good will come of it" I was told, and that I should instead have good fun at the festival and not bother anyone else with mention of this family. This only made me all the more committed to get to the bottom of this and I insisted on being told everything.

Reluctantly the vendor yielded and told me that the family lives in an ancient estate in a forest just outside of town.

Nobody knows how old this house was and nobody dared venture there, but stories were passed down from generation to generation in this town, to beware the ancient estate and the no less ancient family within.They were reclusive and secretive. The townspeople didn't know any of its members or even the exact way to the estate, but some of the family members did occasionally come into town to get supplies from the vendors, including the person I was speaking to that day. This is why the vendor's reaction was different to that of the other townspeople; it came from having actually somewhat regularly interacted with someone from this family. However, from the descriptions of these people that would come for supplies, it became quite clear why the people were so afraid, as they most likely have seen these reclusive beings from afar, whenever they descended into town from their familial home.

According to the vendor they had eerily pale skin, ghostly so, with piercing bright eyes that were always cold and judging, conveying no joy. What else was unnerving in their description was the way they dressed, in all black clothing unlike anything the vendor or the townspeople ever seen, that left no skin visible but their faces. Peculiarly, they apparently wore this attire all year round, with some additional coats in the winter. They didn't speak and would simply point to what they want from the vendor and keep pointing at the item, until they've been given enough. They appeared every now and then for the supplies, scaring everyone in town, but never during the Summer festival, much to everyone's relief.

The vendor told me of the general area where the ancient estate could be found, nobody in town knew the exact location for certain or even of the path to it, as they heeded the warnings they've been handed down to stay out of the forest where it was situated, which was a warning that the vendor repeated to me just before I left. I wandered aimlessly through the town, considering what I've been told. I did not know what to make of it, and the attitude of the town as well as the final warning the vendor gave me caused an internal split.

The fear of the townspeople was all too real and the description of the family members was indeed bizarre. I had not seen them for myself,

yet I now felt uneasy about my task to find and meet them. On the other hand, just what was there to fear besides their freakish appearance? Nobody quite knew because nobody dared venture out into the forest to learn more, and nobody dared approach those that visited the town for supplies, but according to the vendor they were not hostile or even rude, just silent and with an imposing presence. It is certainly unusual behavior but I could not figure out what was there truly to be afraid of. I made up my mind that I must continue with my task, banishing all fear and doubt.

However, with my obsession finally satiated I decided that I need to make up with my partner and newfound friends and join in their merriment. I would pursue my goal afterwards.

Chapter 4

The Fear Returned

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CHAPTER 4. THE FEAR RETURNED

Nobody would blame me for experiencing doubt and fear had they gone through this forest with me, especially with the sun just starting its descent from the sky to the horizon, dusk approaching and setting a mood that was perfect for nurtur-ing troubled thoughts.

I've spent the rest of the previous day with my partner and friends, as well as most of the night, so when I've finally awoken a good part of the day most likely had passed already.

I decided not to bore anyone again with my endeavor and set out alone to discover the ancient familial estate, though I was only aware of an approximate direction for its location and thus cut straight through the forest on the outskirts of the town. However, once I made my way deeper into the forest I came to regret my decision to go alone, and wondered if perhaps I should have woken up my partner to accompany me afterall.

The forest was thick and dark, barely letting in any light, and with the sun's descent it only seemed to grow darker and more immense, as if ever expanding with each disappearing ray of light. When I had just entered it, it seemed to be hot and dank, but the deeper I ventured the colder and drier it became. The trees grew more wild and bent out of shape, seemingly competing with each other for the sunlight above, creating unnatural, looming forms.

I was growing concerned. I had not really planned out how I would go about finding the estate, and now it felt like the further I went the more thoroughly lost I was becoming in a wild labyrinth. A cold wind was picking up and it created eerie, twisted noises as it rushed between the no less twisted trees. It ranged from what seemed to be subtle whispers to outright beastial howling, ringing non-stop in my ears. The forest felt full of life and joy just when I had entered it but now it felt hostile and unwelcoming, almost feral, snarling at my mere presence.

I walked for what seemed like forever until suddenly I saw a stone wall in the distance. I made a dash for it over the twisted roots all over the forest floor, jumping over pud-16

dles of muddy water and patches of dried up grass. Finally I touched the wall with my hand - cold, the same as everything else around me, but this was most likely the wall of the estate. I was not sure in which direction to follow it to find the entrance, but I likewise didn't want to just stand around.

Having chosen a direction, I followed the wall as the wind kept whirling around me and breaking against the wall, the sun slowly descending with fewer rays still making it past the thickness of the forest. Finally, I had come to a gated entrance with a winding path leading to it from somewhere outside the forest.

The gate was was old and imposing, made up of black rods that created intricate designs until they turned to spikes at the top. I couldn't quite understand the circular shapes or patterns they made up, but it was entirely foreign to anything I'd known. I tried pulling at a gate door but to no avail, the whole thing only slightly budging whilst emitting a loud and piercing creaking noise that for a moment took me by uncom-fortable surprise, as I was already jumpy from the constant onslaught of noises that the wind and the forest had assaulted me with thus far. Hesitating for a moment I instead gave it a push and the gate yielded with a much softer creek, allowing me to pass. I slowly made my way further up the path past the gates and soon enough I saw the estate emerge from around a corner of a thick tree line, the forest seemingly growing as dense on the grounds as beyond the fall.

This building was unlike anything known to any living person. In fact, I could very well be the only person to witness it, other than the family that actually occupied its walls.

To say the house was ancient would be an understatement.

Neither back when I initially saw it nor now could I come up with the appropriate words to explain just how old it appeared, and indeed how old it was from what I've been told.

More mesmerizing still was the unique architecture of the estate which defied all imagination, likewise having nothing comparable to it from anything I've ever seen, other than perhaps the oldest building from my University campus. But even then the comparison would be flawed, as that particular 17

building underwent reconstruction generations ago and was made to look more similar to the newer buildings. I have no recollection, nor seen any records of what it used to look like before.

The estate was adorned with all manner of designs and carvings of great craftsmanship and detail which surpassed anything we have today. The entire shape of the house itself seemed to play a part in the narrative of the designs that occupied its surface, with a primary foundation several stories high, a smaller upper story situated on top and occupy-ing only half the space, and a tower like structure proceeding thereafter. The rest of the space was occupied by a sloped roof with a balcony that overlooking the building entrance and a fountain in front of it. The fountain wasn't running and from the looks of it hadn't run in a while, but it too was a sight to behold. It had incredible stone statues forming some kind of vision of multiple people with vases in various poses and some wolves surrounding them at the base, looking outwards from them. Windows of varying size and shape were located to accentuate the shape of the area they were placed in or fit in with a motif of the elaborate decorations, such as a murder of crows flying over the top of a circular window, seemingly held up by a couple more wolves just above the entrance door, which was surrounded on each side by a pillar protruding from the wall.

I had to stop to observe the entirety of this unique and amazing sight. Yet for all its magnificence and splendor, which was unquestionable, it felt so completely alien and menacing that I was both in awe and fear of it. Just as the forest grew to feel hostile, so did this building immediately make me feel somehow small and vulnerable. Was it the effect of the architecture itself or the imposing thoughts of what sort of minds, vastly superior to anything we have today, worked on design-ing and constructing this estate, I cannot say. Writing down all the intricate details of the house would take me far too long and demand too much paper, neither things that I can afford at present, but it should be enough for me to repeat that the sight of this home brought on feelings of awe at its elegance, 18

intimidation of its superior character, and dread of its authors, whose creation alone could make the entirety of modern day humanity feel infinitely small and inferior.

Finally, I made my approach towards the building's entrance, though I did falter, for briefly I thought I had seen something pass in that circular window above, making me even more unnerved for no

rational reason. I had to once again remind myself of my resolve. This is what I came for, and the place was not abandoned, so fearing someone making their way past a window was absurd. I finally came up to the door and once again, to dispel the persistent irrational feeling of dread, repeated to myself that there is logically nothing to fear. Then I knocked on the door.

Chapter 5

The Wolves Snarled at Me

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When I had initially knocked I'd done so very tentatively, still not having completely overcome my dread. After knock-ing again, now more boldly and with a clear echo resonating from behind the door, I stood still and awaited for someone to open it. It started to feel like an eternity had passed with no reaction or any other sounds becoming apparent from within the house. As I stood waiting I closely examined the heavy wooden door in front of me, noting that even it was adorned with detailed designs all over its metal framing. It was a pattern of tiny trees and people, and an occasional wolf. The repetition of the wolf in the decorative design was somehow symbolic, I was sure. I turned around to examine the wolves at the base of the fountain in front of the estate and paid closer attention to them, which is when I discovered that the wolves were snarling at me.

Each stone wolf of the fountain had a more or less unique form, though all of them conveyed the pose of an animal poised for attack, snarling viciously at whomever may dare approach.

It almost felt as if the wolves were guarding the naked stone people of the fountain itself, holding vases from which, I assumed, water used to once spring forth. I was much closer to the fountain than when I had observed it prior, and now could make out just how detailed the wolves and people were, though the details on the latter were somehow off, different from what normal people look like. It was an oddity that was easy to overlook but once I focused on it, it became all the more apparent. The presentation of the people was limited to a couple of basic forms, a more muscular and a more slender, in fact it was unrealistically slender, or at the very least defied all forms of human body I've ever seen.

As I traced my sight over the fountain from top to bottom I had once again come to look at the wolves at the base, with a particular wolf seemingly staring straight at me. This realization started to once again fuel the irrational fear that had persisted with me since the forest. The longer I looked back at it the more real it seemed to become, with its hollowed out pupils darkened by shadows, detailed bloodthisty maw and realistic fur etched from stone. Yet again I was conflicted by 22

a feeling of awe at the immaculate craftsmanship and a deep seated fear churning in the pit of my stomach, sending a cold shiver down my back as I kept staring straight back at the stone wolf.

Finally I heard approaching footsteps and turned around to face the door just before it had opened. What fear had made its way back into my mind was now amplified as I almost jumped in place having finally come face to face with a member of this recluse family, and the descriptions given to me by the vendor were not apt enough to prepare me for this. The person that stood before me was almost as pale as snow with eyes the color of ice, the facial features were weirdly angular and defined, overall giving a rough look which only helped accentuate the intensity of the stare directed at me. It was a mixture of contempt and restrained outrage, as if my mere presence was an insult, a transgression that implied severe consequences. However, there was also a distinct layer of curiosity in there as well, as I was most likely the only outsider to ever seek them out, or so I presumed.

I had to compose myself and upon seeing that this person was not about to attack me or indeed has not so much as said a word to me, I managed to get a grip on myself and calm down enough to start the dialogue myself, in order to state the purpose of my visit. The person did not reply, simply looking more perplexed. I made another attempt only to receive the same quizzical expression. It was then that it dawned on me.

Remembering what the vendor had told me and seeing the reaction I was eliciting now made me consider that perhaps this family simply doesn’t even speak our language. This notion brought on immediate relief and managed to chase away all of my ill thoughts, as I could now trace the fear of the family by the townspeople to a simple issue of communication. However, I then also realized the problem this presented. What if they only spoke in the tongue of the tome? Then all my ef-forts would be for naught, as I wouldn’t be able to ask my questions and they wouldn’t be able to tell me anything even if they somehow implicitly knew what I wanted. Still, this would not dissuade me and so I made an attempt to explain 23

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myself again but now in the old tongue I have mastered at University.

This elicited a completely different reaction; that of surprise and an even more present expression of curiosity. It had turned out that the person too could speak fluently in this old tongue, but indeed knew not a word of my native language.

More surprisingly still, I was informed that the old tongue was indeed their familial tongue, and that every member of the family spoke it. I was greatly relieved by these news but it likewise presented more questions. Still, despite our success at establishing communication this person looked at me with a hint of that judging cold stare of which I was told, thus I decided not to linger too much and explain the purpose of my visit once more, whilst also presenting the tome that put me on this path. The person took out black gloves and proceeded to put them on before taking the tome from me and open-ing it on a random page, a gesture which seemed very odd to me, but my excitement was pushing these thoughts out of my mind.

Just from looking over the page that was opened by pure chance, I was informed that the entire family likewise spoke this dead tongue, which originates in their ancestral home-land, moreover they knew exactly what this tome was and that they have their own copies of it in pristine condition, though not nearly as old as that which I had brought to them and, incredibly, a particular copy in their possession was written in the old tongue we were communicating in now. These revelations were far more than I could have hoped for and I urged to be allowed to question the family members further on the tome, these tongues, and their history. It was then that the judgemental look grew stronger and all hints of curiosity were gone. The person stood there quietly, tapping a finger on the cover of the tome slowly while that cold gaze was running up and down my whole body, as if evaluating what I had asked in relevance to whom I was. Once again uneasy feelings pooled in the pit of my stomach, but I had to stay the course.

The tapping stopped and I was told that the family does not care for outsiders, however there were apparently some ques-24

tions that were on this person’s mind as well, which would be asked of me in return for answers to my own. I wholeheartedly agreed and was told to follow.

I tried to take in as much of the estate interior as possible. However, I was rushed to move swiftly to a small room filled with great many bookcases, their purpose fulfilled to their limit. The sight was

comparable to what I had seen in the forgotten storage room of my University's library, though smaller. It was also occupied with a somewhat large wooden desk, an armchair at the side closer to the window and a couple of wooden chairs across from it, with their backs to the door. I could only wonder why I was led to this room so swiftly - was my host just as eager as myself to begin our exchange and probe me to satiate their own curiosity? Or was it that my presence was still an undesirable intrusion that needed to be resolved as quickly as possible? It could also be that my host simply did not want me to see much of the estate, which would certainly fit the reclusive and secretive nature of this family that was elaborated on by the vendor.

Nevertheless, we managed to establish communication and I was let inside, so perhaps after we've talked properly the host would warm up to me and I'd be allowed to see more of this magnificent house.

Still, doubt and foreboding lingered persistently in the back of my mind. The eerie look of my host and those ever judging eyes were a continuation of a common theme that started in the deeper regions of the forest, and so was, frankly, what I did glance of the estate interior, as well as the room we were in at that moment. Inside, the house was just as elaborately decorated as the outside, surpassing anything that I've ever seen or heard of. Strikingly beautiful glass ornaments hung from the ceiling in several places. The decorative patterns on the dark wallpaper was in some areas faded or even torn, which was actually deceptive as to the actual age of the building, as I suspected this family took great pride and thus great care in its upkeep.

I can only imagine how truly ancient this building was, but 25

it is clear that its outer and inner vestiges were in complete unison, no attempts were made to redecorate or modernize a single element. Their synchronicity was also betrayed by how the inside was just as imposing as the outside. Moreso even, for when I faced the house the source of ill thoughts was simply in front of me, now I was in the belly of the beast, surrounded by it on all sides, constrained and suffocated by mounting evidence of a completely alien and vastly superior intelligence which had erected this structure. And I was being lead deeper within its bowels by what was most certainly a representative of this intelligence.

The wolf motif was likewise present in the interior, the main hall after the threshold inside the house featured a grand stairway which split

into smaller stairways leading in opposite directions to an inside upper balcony which overlooked the hall - on each side of the grand stairway were busts of wolves, not aggressive like those at the fountain base outside, but merely sitting in an attentive upright position and looking intently towards the entrance of the estate. The centrepiece of the the entire hall, however, was a great big woven tapestry on the wall above the grand stairway - it too featured a wolf, in profile, though rather unrealistically portrayed. It stood on its hind paws and looked more massive than the biggest wolf imaginable in the wild. It's maw was wide open, bear-ing deadly fangs, though, curiously, it seemed to be holding or propping up some object or symbol I was wholly unfamiliar with, a kind of jagged line that was crossed in the middle by a much shorter straight line.

On our way to the room filled with books I witnessed many amazing things, most notably the majestic drawings framed on the walls which depicted more of these incredible pale beings in a variety of scenes. Yet it was the skill of these images that once again lead me to believe that everything related to this family was wholly inhuman or surpassed what is human by far. The details could rival those of photos I had seen of my university campus in previous generations, while maintaining a distinct visual style that is absolutely absent in photog-raphy. Most of these scenes demanded a leap of imagination

to produce, lest they were, in fact, portraying some form of reality that was unlike what I or anyone alive has ever known.

Finally, they exhumed some forceful presence which I could not understand and was perhaps known and truly felt only by beings who originated these images and by those with whom they were related.

By now, had you not discarded my notes and kept on reading, I imagine you've already pondered repeatedly why I ram-ble on and on about such things and the feelings they evoked in me. Perhaps you've already taken me for an impression-able fool, yet I reiterate my points and draw special attention to what I felt because I want to impress upon you the exact magnitude of these observations and the conclusions that could be drawn from them. Moreover, I must stress that my inner experiences were of a wholly animalistic nature. They were some deep rooted instinct that was stirring within me to initially avoid and then escape these surroundings and the reclusive family - an instinct which was, as I observe now in retrospect, more in tune

with the gravity of the situation than my conscious mind could be back then. My rational mind and employ of logic only served to muffle, obscure and ridicule a completely healthy reaction.

No matter how frequently I may repeat and reiterate what fear, awe, intimidation and other ill things I've felt, it will always be a woeful understatement of the full potency of a personal experience. I can only hope that you never come to bear witness of these things for yourself as I have. However I still feel an urge to transcribe them in as much detail as I possibly can, to convey as much of it as possible on paper, though I am not sure why. Perhaps to act as a warning, so that someone else can figure out what should be done or if, indeed, there is anything that can be done. The far-reaching implications of what was revealed to me in the conversation that I had with the host would sooner startle most into a stupor, than lend themselves to ideas for how to react to such knowledge. If nothing else, this journal may at least be the only record that tells the truth behind the events which would transpire much later.

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My host sat in the armchair at the wooden table while gesturing for me to sit in a wooden chair on the opposite side. I had inquired out of almost childlike curiosity about the chair my host then occupied, and I was told that it was made of leather and was custom ordered many generations ago for when the house had initially been built. Sure enough, I found confirmation to that as I noticed that the armrests of the chair were decorated at the front with small wooden wolf heads. The host put down the tome that had brought me all the way here to their doorstep, and expressed a desire to start by questioning me and thereafter we would tend to my own inquiries. I once again wholeheartedly agreed, thinking that this would help build trust and understanding - this made me feel as if I was an emissary of the outside world, trying to help someone better understand our society and perhaps even in-tegrate into it, a noble goal that caused me to swell up with pride which temporarily alleviated all my fears and concerns.

The questions that followed were truly those of someone completely isolated from any news of the world at large, per-taining to current and past events of as far back as I could possibly remember or share knowledge of. Other questions had to do with current customs, culture, way of life - truly it was as if speaking to an alien being that

had only recently arrived to our planet and attempted to take in as much information as possible. I gladly answered each question, though it appeared as though my answers did not bring understanding or the kind of satisfaction that comes with quenching a person's curiosity. Everything seemed to be going in the opposite direction, as the host's expression grew from that of calm interest with a faint air of apprehension to an ever more expressive kind of disdain and angry, judgemental abhorrence.

The more I spoke the more my pride and flattering image of being some noble representative were diminished under the ever more stern and cold expression behind my host's icy blue eyes.

I started to feel ever smaller from uncertainty of how well this exchange was going, though I was sure that I've done my best to answer truthfully and to the best of my ability.

Indeed, my host confirmed that my answers were satisfac-tory, so I could only conclude that it was the information itself which was causing the negative reaction. All my assump-tions of this simply being a case of misunderstanding due to no means of real communication had been crushed, and I once again started to consider the vast differences between us. As was evident from what I've witnessed so far of the estate and the splendors within, those differences seemed to go as far as this family being quite literally a different kind of beings that looked down on humanity as a whole. I desperately tried to chase away this oppressive thought but could not come up with any other rational reason for my host's apparent dismay at what I've told.

Something else of peculiar nature cropped up during my answering the host's questions, where he'd interrupt me at random moments to correct my use of the old tongue. He would bring up words that in my studies I had been told at some point became obsolete, or more perplexing still, words I had never heard of before. This was yet another testament to just how ancient and conscious of preserving its ways this family was as it apparently retained a purer form of the old tongue which just before this moment I had delusionally thought I knew fluently.

Once we'd diverted into the subject of the differences between my

native language and the tongue we were speaking in now, we'd managed to identify a gap in our perception of reality. The old tongue had words for concepts entirely unknown to the modern world, hence the absence of any equiv-alents in my native language. This was most likely the exact reason why these words did not survive to this day even in my own University where this old tongue is taught. Other words seemed to impose certain limitations that are, to the contrary, clearly absent from our reality. I had thought this to be a shortcoming of the old tongue but my musings on the matter were met with a stern and cold rejection from my host, who insisted that these limitations do exist, regardless if I am aware of them or not, more so that they exist contrary to what I know to be true from experiences in my own daily life. He 29

declared any opposition to this to be no more than fancy of inferior minds.

...inferior...

My darkest suspicions were confirmed as soon as the word was uttered. Whoever my host and his family were, they represented something that exists outside normal humanity of today, if not outside humanity as a whole. The thought gave rise to a tide of panic which I had to suppress with all my strength. My primal fears had grown fangs with which to tear at any last vestiges of rational thought that could calm me down. Fangs like those of the fountain wolves that snarled at me outside. My host was silently staring at me and I now abandoned all hopes of keeping that deep-seated horror at bay, choosing to instead focus all of my faculties on at least putting up a front of normalcy in my demeanor. I had thanked him for informing me of the finer details and new words of the old tongue and promised him that I'd do my best to adjust my speech to employ them properly in our conversation from that point onwards. Beneath the same cold and judging visage he seemed to be somewhat pleased.

We spoke further on some of the apparent differences in perception of reality which the differences of our languages betrayed. Finally, my host told me that he was satisfied with all of my answers and that I may now question him. My curiosity was by then perhaps the only positive force left within me that kept me strong and kept me going, the only thing that could somewhat distract me from the mounting terror of what I learned and the even more so terrifying implications that knowledge presented. I asked my host about the accursed tome

that dragged me all the way out here, and was presented with a fairly short though comprehensive answer: the tome was supposedly a personal account of a great strug-gle undertaken by a member of their own kind against con-spiring, malicious forces. The tale was seemingly more myth than fact as there is nothing in known history that could serve as a fair comparison. Indeed, I questioned if this heroic figure truly ever lived or if his tale was but a work of fiction. I 30

started to consider a possible religious origin of the tome but feared to express more independent analysis of information I was presented, least I again invoke the ire of my host.

I was not required to speak at all really, as my host went into a lengthy tirade about the tome, the tongue it was written in, the land where it originated, about the history, beliefs and perception of reality of these beings, seemingly so human save for their ghastly pigmentation and only some oddities about their forms, at least as far as my host's example was concerned. All evidence, however, was pointing to them being of a wholly inhuman or vastly superior to human nature.

I very much doubt I would have been able to say anything even if my whole body was screaming out for me to do so, for I was held captive by these expressive tales and descriptions which had unleashed a paralyzing new wave of terror. It was this part of our conversation that had brought me so close to the edge of sanity, which had made me question everything I have ever known and made me want to run and keep on running until the day I die - death seemingly being the only thing that could offer ultimate escape from this knowledge, its earth-shattering implications, and that sound.

My host once again confirmed the worst of my suspicions as he wove together a story so elaborate that I could hardly doubt it. This family was indeed a representation of the few vestiges still in existence of a completely different race of beings, some clans still surviving all over the world, a world that they once dominated, in some past so distant that it exists outside anything known to humanity. They built great cities and monumental temples, some of which would apparently eclipse even this estate in their grandeur. These beings, however, did not come from some distant star or from beyond the pale of this reality, but were apparently natives to our planet and "it's true heirs", as my host put it. He finally revealed in no uncertain terms exactly how much he loathes our own "inferior race", who had come to own

the world after his own kind fell into ruin and subsequent near extinction. The being in front of me had nothing but real and true hatred for humanity, recalling back to me what I had just told him of the state of the 31

world today, declaring how everything about us screamed of inadequacy, degeneracy and complacency with being worse than the basest of animals.

I once again felt as if I was a representative of my kind, yet now it was solely because I was on the receiving end of an angered and vengeful force that expressed to me the ire that was meant for all of humanity. I am fairly sure that my attempts at maintaining my composure were all for naught, for back then I was so intently focused on each word my host uttered that I could not truly think of anything else. I can't even imagine what I must have looked like in that state, and my host made no comments as to my condition, raving on and on with the fury of a force of nature, like a storm or a tornado. I would have taken offense to the sort of things that were being spat at me, however I had already come to witness for myself clear evidence of their superiority. None of our buildings can compare to the majesty of this estate, as they are so plain, form following function. Our art, likewise, could not hold a candle to the absolutely unique images I had seen framed in the hallway we had gone down towards this room. The language likewise betrayed an expanded vision when compared to our own, despite those certain limitations it attempted to impose.

With that evidence fresh in my mind, moreover, with that evidence still being present all around me, how could I doubt everything else that my host had told me? That there used to be at some point buildings even greater than their familial home? It only seemed to make sense that temples and other buildings that surpass the importance and value of a private home would be treated to appear even more incredible than this. I could not doubt that these beings were indeed our superiors, which was the very source of all my terror - superior beings that held our kind in the lowest form of contempt.

Moreover, in his ravings my host also implied that we were not just simply inferior by our basic nature, but that we were also carriers of disease. For a moment my mind flashed back to when I had initially handed the tome to this being, and he took out black gloves to hold it with. I was also re-32

minded of the vendor's story of how they came to town in clothes that only expose their faces. Were they afraid of coming in direct contact with us, for fear of contracting some unknown disease? This could have been a comforting thought, had we indeed been carriers of something that was deadly to these beings and completely harmless to ourselves, yet apparently that is not at all the case. My host actually claimed, that our kind lives pitifully short lives because of the disease that we carry. This disease was somehow perpetuated by our way of life, though he had not delved too deeply on the matter, and I could not draw out any other conclusions. Instead, he went on to say that a generation of his kind could easily outlive several of our own, reaching the peak of their prime just as we were facing our own death. Are we indeed afflicted by some hitherto unknown malady that cuts short our lives so drastically?

This whirlwind of fury that I had been caught in was suddenly interrupted when we both heard the door to the room open behind me. When I turned around, what I came to witness had completely cleared the slate of everything I was experiencing and feeling. In the doorway to the room stood another of their kind, a ghostly white apparition of a slender frame, exactly like the naked statues of the fountain and the hallway drawings depicted. It had long flowing hair that shone like the sun, and bright eyes, a face that too held peculiar angular features, though much softer than those of my host, having an overall more delicate appearance. While I could say that I've seen plenty of human beings who shared a similar body structure to that of my host, the same could not be said about this being, who was completely unique and stirred some unknown emotions within me. I was most certainly shocked, as anyone would be when facing something so alien, something that stood as further proof to the horrors I have learned. And yet, at that moment the messenger of my existential terror was nothing less than a vision of absolute beauty.

I wonder now, if I had simply felt an attraction for the ex-otic. This would be a comforting thought when considering 33

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other options, namely that I might have been on the receiving end of some sinister power or spell that these beings were capable of, and that my host did not inform me of. For all I know they could indeed possess some unimaginable powers that could make any of their whims a reality. After all, according to my host, his kind had not lost

dominion of our world because they lost a war to some other incredible beings or humanity itself, but rather, that it was undone by their own fall from grace. The implication of this possibility would be that if these beings so desired, they could easily take back what they believe to be rightfully theirs from humanity with ease, by using some unimaginable to us powers that could very well either enslave or destroy us.

The only other possible reasoning I can come up with for that mysterious effect that being had over me is no less troubling, namely that it was admiration for witnessing perfection itself, once again reaffirming the horribly inescapable and imposing fact of the superior nature of these beings. Their art was not merely imagination, it was inspired and drawn out of their own nature and their own forms, making themselves no less than creatures of art. I would have never thought it possible until that day, that beauty could be a harbinger of so much doubt and of such cosmic horror, for humanity was not alone on this planet, and the other race we unknowingly shared it with were our superiors and its former masters, who harbored great detestation of our kind and our inheritance of what they thought to be rightfully theirs. The vision of beauty was likewise a vision of vengeance.

Yet all of these observations I make now in retrospect, for back then, in that room, I could only stare in dumbfounded awe at the mysterious and captivating being that intruded my host's revelations. It could have been a mere moment or an eternity, but at some point our eyes had met and in them I could see shock, the kind that I saw in the eyes of my host when he had seen me standing on the porch of the estate, that expression of restrained outrage at my presence. Still, I cannot shake the feeling that I had also seen something akin to fear flash behind those deep blue eyes.

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I was brought out of my trance by a loud, sharp, almost bark-like noise. It was my host. He had shouted something at his kin standing in the door, the bark turned out to be but the beginning of a volley of sounds that I realized to be words, which he unleashed in a language that I could not understand, coarse and rough, it tore through my daze like thunder.

The being looked up at my host and I could not truly identify the facial expression that came just before it disappeared in a whirlwind

of golden hair, as the being ran out of the room, slamming the door behind. When I turned around to face my host once more he was simply staring at the closed door.

A moment's pause had passed before he looked down at me again. His previous fury was gone as he reverted back to that calm, judging and cold expression that he had just before our conversation began. All of this commotion had momentarily helped me to regain control of myself and with my host's fury interrupted I had felt that it was safe for me to speak, and so I asked him who it was that had just fled from our presence.

His facial expression once again grew more hateful, but this more controlled, and he told me in a low and menacing voice to forget that I had ever seen her.

Before I could really process that answer my host had turned to a particular bookcase in the room and removed a tome from a shelf. He placed it on the table next to the the tome that I had brought with me, saying that this was the family's copy of it, that was written in the old tongue we were communicating in. My host asked me what else, exactly, did I really need to know about the tome, to which I answered in almost automated fashion with that formula that had driven me to find these beings to begin with, that I had come to learn of its history and origins, to find a way to translate it, and to possibly learn the language it was written in. In reality, I wanted nothing more than to escape that house as fast as possible, and the idea of staying with these creatures and learning their language now seemed to be preposterous, not only for my fear of them, but also for their hatred of me and my kind. Expect-edly, my host denied any possibility of them teaching me the language of the tome, moreover declaring that it was a relic 35

of their former civilization that should rightfully remain with them.

I do not know if I would have truly protested against this, for the door behind me was opened once more, revealing yet another member of the family, though what stood in the doorway was a stark difference to the vision of beauty that had come before. An even more base, primal fear had taken over me and almost made me jump out of my chair at witnessing this ghoulish parody of my host. They shared a similar frame, though this creature seemed thinner and slightly hunched over in an unnatural way, and even more similar facial

features, yet this creature's pale skin seemed to be pulled tightly over the skull, with great many weird indentations and lines, almost like scars, and hair as white as snow. It was the most visually bizarre and outright horrifying thing I had come to witness on that day or ever in my life, for no human being could ever come to look so hideous.

The pure cold rage that this monster radiated surpassed what I've seen from my host by far, as its unrestrained hateful gaze burned straight through me. It walked closer to me and my host, prompting itself up with some manner of stick or rod on its right side, finally provoking my fears to overtake me as I clumsily dropped out of the chair and backed away from it, like a cornered animal. It raised its bony finger at me, hand slightly shaking as it turned its gaze to my host and demanded in a low, raspy yet steely voice to know what I was doing here, except that I did not recognize the word by which I was described. Certainly mine was the presence in question, but I had never heard the word that was uttered before. Was it their own word for human beings? I could only guess, but the hatefulness and outrage was accentuated in the creature's tone of voice when it had pronounced that alien word.

After that they began an exchange in that coarse language of the tome, of which I could not understand a word. The host led the monster calmly back into the hallway, closing the door behind them where they continued to converse. I was left in the room alone, a momentary reprieve from what by 36

now seemed to be a nonstop onslaught onto my being in every sense of the word, a reprieve that I was most thankful for, yet worried by this new development. I strained myself to hear their exchange in hopes that maybe I could understand the general context of their conversation. Everything was muffled by the door between us, but it seemed that whilst the monster rasped loudly and angrily, my host's tone was more reserved and seemed to imply an attempt to placate the creature with some manner of reasoning. A moment of realization struck me then, that the ghoul was most likely the head of this family, rather than my host. The reason for the similarity of their appearance was most likely because of their familial relationship. Was the monster, in fact, an ancestor of my host? Was it's terrifying appearance due to their unnaturally and inhumanly long life spans?

It was then, that in my musings and the muffled conversation from behind the door slowly fading from my conscious attention, that I had

heard that sound. It slowly and seamlessly invaded my hearing and my thoughts, faint and rhythmic, maintaining a monotonous pace, like a steady and continuous drum beat. As I focused on the sound it appeared to slowly grow louder with each beat, prompting me to go looking for its source. All my thoughts of where I was, the revelations I learned, of this inhuman horror all around me were wiped clean as I desperately tried to pinpoint the origin of that infernal sound that became the sole focus of all my faculties. It only grew louder, drowning out everything else around it, as if paralyzing all my senses as even my vision seemed to become more blurred as I frantically looked around the room.

Finally, I had managed to discover the object that produced this damnable sound that had by now made my skin crawl.

It appeared to be a peculiar circular device on a bookshelf

- it had several moving parts and was covered in weird symbols that I had never seen before, like letters, yet not. These hieroglyphs were nothing like what I've seen in my linguistic studies, sprawled all around this demonic device which kept on producing that sound. I stared at it, unsure of what to do, a sense of unease and dread returning in full force, in 37

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fact, growing stronger than before. With each beat the oppressive sound made my terror grow and was driving me closer to complete madness! I'm sure I was hyperventilating as I put my hands over my ears in the vain hopes of blocking out that sound of impending terror, but it was of no use. It seemed to have fully invaded my mind as I could now hear it inside my head!

The door swung open once more with a loud noise as it smashed against the wall and I was brought out of that horrifying state that had trapped me, the sound now gone. I turned around to look at my host who in a commanding tone told me that I must leave. I don't believe I was thinking anything at all at that point, as my mind was completely numbed by what had just transpired, unbeknown to my host. My animalistic fears took over completely and made me run past him, down the hallway back to the estate entrance. My host followed me close behind, and when I had reached the door I grabbed the handle but momentarily something actually compelled me to turn around. The monster from before stood at the base of the grand stairway, glaring at me with a vicious expression, with both its hands planted

on that rod that it had used earlier when it walked. Just beneath the wolf tapestry stood that vision of beauty, its eyes a mixture of apprehension and concern. My host was right next to me, staring at me expectantly.

I suddenly realized that there were more of them in the hall, more of these pale inhuman beings walking somewhere upstairs on the inner balcony. More footsteps seemed to approach from a different hallway, opposite to that which we had used. The sound of the approaching footsteps suddenly reignited that infernal sound inside my head, growing louder yet again. The whole thing must have lasted no more than a mere moment until I finally swung open the door and ran as fast as my feet could possibly go, away from this horror of cosmic scale. All I could think about as I ran down that winding path away from the estate and out those gates was how they looked at me when I finally departed that place of terror.

That look which they shared with the wolves of the fountain.

Those wolves that snarled at me.

Chapter 6

That Infernal Sound

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CHAPTER 6. THAT INFERNAL SOUND

Even though I managed to finally escape that house it seemed as if I could not outrun and escape that infernal sound! The sun had finally disappeared from the sky but it had not yet gone dark, and my only hope was to make it out of the forest before then. My flight from the estate felt like that of a hunted animal. I followed the path out of the forest, driven by a sin-gular need to get away, to escape and find safety, for even though that house of wolves was far behind me, the twisted forest still felt as if it were a part of their domain.

The winds had grown more furious and it's howling persisted around me, as if chasing me out. In fact, it might very well have been actual wolves howling as they ran beside me, somewhere behind the thick veil of trees! The last remnants of light were diminishing fast and it began to feel as if I had been running in a void of total blackness, cold and terrible winds surrounding me. All the while, I could hear that sound cut through everything else, coming in clear as day, assaulting my sanity in that rhythmic pace, booming inside my mind like thunder. The darkness completely enveloped my vision as I could see nothing but the void, a void as vast as the cosmic horror that I had experienced and as dark as that terrible fear which kept me running.

Suddenly something hit my legs with great force and sent me flying forward and tumbling over with my legs almost flying over my head until I fell down, causing a shock to re-verberate throughout my body. For a moment, though it may very well have been an eternity, I lay motionless on the ground in seemingly total silence, dazed from the fall which seemingly had reset all my faculties. I slowly got off the ground and looked around, only to discover that it wasn't yet nearly as dark as I imagined as I could still see everything around me quite clearly. The noise was gone and the winds had receded to a very gentle breeze. Had the maddening sound once again afflicted all my senses, blurring my vision until I could see nothing but black, yet amplifying my hearing so that the winds would sound louder?

As I turned around, I had discovered the cause for my sud-40

den return to sanity, as well as a very aching body. It had been a very low wooden gate, overgrown with various green-ery, making it almost completely blend with the forestation around it, which, I had discovered, was once again that more welcoming and gentle forest that I had seen from when I had just begun my journey earlier that day. I stood up and for a moment looked back over the gate to see what little was left of that path I had followed in my escape, which seemed to fade out just before the wooden gate.

I found myself much calmer than before, my fears almost completely knocked out of me. Still, I felt unease and the longer I stood there, thinking about what had transpired, the more I felt my horror returning. This prompted me to get on my way back to town, trying to distract myself from these thoughts. I had discovered the road into town just a little further away from the gate and breathed a sigh of true relief, for I had believed my ordeal to finally be over.

On my way back into town I could not completely chase away my thoughts. How would anyone be truly able to do so after going through such experiences as I have, after learning what I have? I contemplated what I would tell my partner, moreover, what I would tell the professors back at my University, for my task was not simply a failure, but I had likewise lost the tome itself. I honestly didn't know if I could even tell them the truth. Nobody would be likely to believe me.

They'd think me utterly mad! A superior, vengeful, inhuman race living besides us? Would they even believe my description of the estate, let alone the beings that inhabited it? Yet what else could I tell them? Would I have to craft an innocent lie about having lost the tome by some clumsy accident and never discovering anything about the mysterious recluse family? I felt that something had to be done with this information, yet I was completely lost. I was the sole witness to a horror that is so well beyond imagination that I would not be able to share it with anyone and have them believe me.

I finally made it back into town, true darkness finally settling in, though here everything was bright, lit with many 41

festive lights. The townspeople were still awake and going about joyfully enjoying the festival and the avid nightlife. I could not help myself but envy their ignorance of the terror that lurked so close to them, for their fear of the mysterious and weird pale beings clad in

black that only occasionally descended upon the town and made swift departure after acquiring their supplies, was that of innocent ignorance. It could not compare to the inconceivable, yawning black abyss of my existential horror, which seemed to eyelessly stare right at me, observing my every move.

Once I returned to our hostel, I had discovered that my partner and our new friends were just departing from it to enjoy a night of merriment at an ongoing event that they learned was taking place. My partner could see that I was distraught, though he did not inquire as to my well-being or what could have caused my tired and almost lifeless state, instead immediately saying that I look like I need to have some fun. I considered their offer to come with them to the event and agreed, for I needed a distraction, I desperately needed to forget.

We spent the better portion of the night at the open event with many people coming and going, an atmosphere of good fun and enjoyment thick in the hot summer air. Initially I had tried to stick with my partner and our new friends, but eventually I was persuaded to mingle more with a number of townspeople and other travelers who made their way here for the festival. Yet I could not find rest or reprieve, feeling constantly on edge, driving me to seek out something, anything, anyone who'd be able to help me escape this discomfort that was slowly creeping under my skin, as if something was slowly burrowing within me. At some point my behavior turned to that of panicked desperation, which certainly had become apparent to everyone who had met me at the event, though nobody bothered to comment on it.

I could not identify what it was, what malady had afflicted me. It was like an itch that I couldn't scratch. But at some point, over all the loud noises and the music, I realized that there was a very faint presence that seemed to exist in paral-42

lel to everything else I heard. It was much quieter than the music and other noises, but it existed separately from them, making it impossible to miss - it was that infernal sound! It had followed me all the way there, stalking me from some dark recesses of my mind! That was the source of my ill state, the origin of some uneasy feeling of impending disaster, that steady, rhythmic, drum-like sound! However, unlike before it was not growing louder, but kept the same faint level, without drowning out all other noises around me. I had tried to chase it away, to ignore it, pretend its not there, tried drowning it out by

placing myself closer to the music that was being played - all for naught.

Finally, I hastily departed from the event without notify-ing my partner, for my agitation and desperation had completely overtaken me as I could not think of anything else but that damnable sound which had latched onto me from that insidious device! I ran through the town streets looking for any other means of drowning it out or distracting myself, going from venue to venue, my state drawing some curiosity, but for the most part I had been ignored. I returned back to the hostel, to our room which was now vacant. In my bag I had found my study books, hoping that if the festival merriment could not distract me, then perhaps my long fostered interest would. I could barely focus, but at some point I finally managed to detach myself from everything and fully immerse my mind in the materials of the study book. Soon enough, my mind was sufficiently numbed and a deep, dreamless sleep overtook me.

I woke up late into the next day, the sun shining brightly through the room window. My awakening was not immediate, as for a while I seemed to be in a trance. I simply stared at the ceiling above me, no thoughts going through my head.

When I finally regained some awareness, I got out of bed and after a bath departed to get something to eat. I had eaten my last meal just before I had gone into the forest in search of the recluse family, which seemed like ages ago. I simply went through the motions, my mind holding only simple thoughts that were associated with my immediate actions and needs: 43

get up, wash, get dressed, go eat. I had obviously been completely drained by the events of the previous day, reducing me to a mere automaton. My only truly self-aware thoughts returned when I had finally sat down to eat. They were of how the eggs were burnt and chewy. By when I had finished eating, the numbness that afflicted my mind finally faded and I was once again alert and in full control of my faculties. However, I was not alone.

That sound had returned. As soon as I finished eating and just sat at my table, observing my surroundings. It was still with me, that wicked companion that had pursued me since the moment I discovered it in that room filled with bookcases, that room where my world had been turned inside out. Yet now it seemed to exist in the background as

opposed to how it overlayed all other sounds the previous night. I discovered this to be less intrusive, less offensive to my sanity and senses, but it was still unmistakably there, in the dark corners of my mind. It was like a patient predator, menacing and calculat-ing, as if waiting for a chance to resume its assault and finally shatter my sanity. It made me feel uneasy, like an invisible presence was subtly following me whilst constantly remind-ing me of just how close it was, as if toying with me. My ner-vousness could not compare to the horror and desperation of the previous day, but it was a constant reminder of the terror I had lived through.

I attempted to ignore it, vainly hoping that its diminished potency was some last lingering after-effect of my ordeal which would inevitably pass. I've decided to go for a walk around town by myself, once again seeking out something to help me distract myself, which was all for naught as the infernal sound persisted with me throughout everything. I didn't want to tire myself out and thus possibly make my condition worse, so I stayed away from any strenuous activities and simply par-took in the more lighthearted of merriments. Yet, the sound had, in fact, progressed to be ever so slightly louder than before.

Later on I had once again come across my partner, who 44

had been exploring the town and festive activities on his own.

Our friends from the hostel apparently had split up to meet new people. We spent most of the day together as he dragged me off to some of the events I had initially tried to avoid, yet now agreed to, thinking that perhaps something more active would serve to distract me from that sound. Instead, it had grown to be louder, just like it did the night before. The presence in the shadows now actively circled my conscious mind in that predatory way just before the pounce.

I could already foresee a repeat of my panicked desperation from the night prior if I wouldn't figure out how to chase away that accursed sound for good! I had once again split up with my partner by then, as my deteriorating state was apparent enough for him to brand me a killjoy as he departed to seek out fun elsewhere. Indeed, the sound was slowly driving me to madness as I trembled slightly all over and could feel cold sweat all over me in the heat of the summer. The sun was already setting as I finally had come up with a new idea, the only idea I had left and hadn't tried before: I had decided that I would have to go back to that house of wolves, sneak inside it somehow to

examine that device which infected my mind with this parasitic sound. I had no desire to come face to face with any of the creatures that inhabited the estate again, especially so now. After all, it was likely they would at best reject my request, while the worst case outcomes were absolute unfathomable. Who knows what unimaginable things they might do to me? Though perhaps, I alone can somewhat speculate on that matter, having learned what I know now. Were I to be discovered trespassing inside their home unannounced, however...

Yet I could not dwell on these thoughts. The only alter-native was to succumb to the sound and inevitably be driven insane! I concluded that I had no other options and had to act immediately. Thus I departed from the town as fast as I could, back to the wooden gate beyond which was the hidden path to that house of wolves, to the seat of cosmic horror and utter madness.

Chapter 7

The Device

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CHAPTER 7. THE DEVICE

The sound was all I could think of on my way back to the estate. It had once again receded to the background, yet was ever present, steady and rhythmic, that uncompromisingly steady march towards insanity. The insidious device occupied my thoughts, its shape, the hieroglyphs it was covered in, the exact bookshelf of the exact bookcase that it was placed in.

I attempted to remember if there was anything about it that would betray some way of interacting with it, perhaps some way of turning it off. Would that stop the sound? What was to prevent those beings from turning it back on if I were to leave it there? Should I take it with me? Would they notice and if they were to notice, what would their reaction be? I had no true comprehension of the device's nature nor of its importance to these beings, thus I could not risk stealing it from them - who knows what their reaction might be. I inevitably came to the conclusion that I must sabotage it, find a way of breaking it without making it obvious that it was tampered with. Yet, I did not have the confidence that I was capable of that, nor would I have the opportunity to truly study that alien device long enough to understand how it works.

I was so preoccupied in my thoughts that I had forgotten about the sound, though I am certain that it was still with me, for I likewise did not pay attention to the winds around me nor the twisted nature of the deeper regions of the forest.

Indeed, what had me terrified just the other day, right now practically did not exist for me as I was fully engrossed in my thoughts as my determination to liberate myself from that sound pushed me onwards.

I had returned to the gate of the estate grounds and that's when the full gravity of my new endeavor had come back to me as I stood in front of it, shivering from the cold winds which I could hear all too clearly once again. Night had already descended upon the forest and the sound had again occupied the forefront of my senses, tagging away at my sanity, all the while my fears creeped back under my skin. Nevertheless, I felt that I had no other choice and thus concentrated all my strength and determination before pushing a gate door open.

CHAPTER 7. THE DEVICE

I made my way further up the path until I was finally just at the last turn, around which I knew the estate would come into full view. I had decided to go through the trees rather than around them along the path, in the hopes that if any of those beings were close to a window I would not be immediately seen. Peaking out from behind a tree I could see the estate clearly, its finer details invisible in the dark veil of the night, turning it into a menacing black shadow that loomed over the fountain in front. Light was only radiating from a few windows on different levels of the building, some bright, others more faint.

I could not tell if anyone was standing at windows which were not lit, and thus invisible to me from within the black shadow of the house, but the windows that did have light emanate from them seemed to be empty. It was the most I could hope for as I made a dash to my right, to quickly cross the path where I would be exposed in full view and disappear behind the trees again. I proceeded to follow the treeline to the right of the estate entrance, remembering that the room with the device had to be on that side. Thankfully, the forest came very close to the sides of the estate, though I could see further ahead that behind the state there was a big area completely devoid of trees, though I could hardly make out anything else in the dark and could only speculate about the general outlines of something akin to a large garden.

In front of me was a large window, surrounded on each side by those of lesser size. I could definitively conclude that the furthermost left window had to lead into the room. It had to be the window that was behind the armchair in which my host sat for some portion of our engagement, for the other window was too large and the last was too far away from my approximate guess of the room's placement. I slowly approached it, almost crouching, before I hugged the wall of the estate and slowly peered inside the room from the lower corner of the window. It was dark inside. The door to it from the hallway was closed, and it appeared to be completely empty of any living presence. I hoped beyond hope that the window would be open, so that I would not have to force my way in-49

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side, causing enough commotion to alert the entire house to my intrusion. At last, some good fortune was sent my way, as the window

had easily yielded, only somewhat creaking from lack of regular use.

Once I had climbed inside I attempted to locate some source of light, yet all I could make out was a candle that was left on the table with some matches laying besides it, though I considered this to be for the best, as too much light would most likely betray my presence if it were as dark in the hallway beyond the door as it was inside the room before I had lit the candle. Soon as I had some light illuminating the immediate space around me, I took pause, having noticed the books on the same table, the accursed ancient tome with which it all had begun... and its somewhat newer, yet nevertheless aged coun-terpart, the family copy written in the language I had studied at University. My curiosity had returned to me, an old forgotten friend that had been scared out of me by everything that had transpired within this very room, prompting me to open the cover and take a quick look at a few initial pages.

The initial page after the cover was blank, however having turned it over I discovered it to contain a black and white por-trait of another of these pale beings with some peculiar facial hair. It was yet again something very alien and completely unfamiliar to regular human life. Its gaze was directed somewhere into the unknown, beyond, as if looking somewhere to my left. It possessed a steely, calm demeanor and the overall image, just like those I've seen in the hallway, had some mesmerizing force to it, which I likewise could not fully compre-hend. On the next page appeared to be the title of the tome, though I could not understand the words written - did they, perhaps, leave the original title of the tome untranslated from its original dead language? Then I discovered that closer to the bottom of the page there were the several hieroglyphs, exactly like those on the surface of the device, except with a basic circle, unless it was the letter "O", between them.

It was then that I heard it again, yet not from within my own mind, it was again a real and traceable sound that reached 50

my ears from a certain shelf of a certain bookcase. Low and rhythmic, like a steadily beaten drum, it carried on and on, though now retaining its low volume, not growing louder. I was once again staring at the device which planted that sound within my mind as a seed of madness, to have it grow and consume me from within. I picked it up from the shelf and started to examine it closely on all sides, but I could not figure out the hieroglyphs or the pattern of their placement on it, nor could I locate anything that would turn it off. There was

some kind of mechanism, yet manipulating it did nothing but make some of its parts move faster, all the while the sound itself remained unchanged. I likewise could not locate any panel or window or access inside of the device where I could sabotage it. The sound once again started to grow louder, just as it did when I had previously faced it, slowly hammering away at my patience as my frustration grew with each beat, consum-ing my senses and driving me into a frantic, angry state.

Then, it happened. My biggest fear in this undertaking had been realized - I had been discovered. The door into the room was opened and light streamed inside, revealing me to whomever it was standing in the doorway, yet before I had a chance to even turn around to see who had caught me, I had been startled by a high pitched scream, prompting me to drop the device. It fell to the floor, its circular panel breaking and a crack erupted over the rest of its surface. And yet, as I stared at it there, on the floor, it was still producing that sound. I finally turned around to discover that it was the slender apparition that stood in the door. My eyes had not yet adjusted in the dark, and I could not see its facial expression, more impor-tantly, I was certain that her scream alerted the entire family.

She suddenly screamed at me in an angered tone, blaming me for breaking the device to which she referred by yet another word that is utterly unknown to me.

I had to escape quick, so I made my way to climb back out the window when I suddenly felt her grab my right arm in an attempt to delay me while calling out for help. I could already hear a commotion from somewhere down the hall. That primal fear once again overtook my whole body and all my 51

faculties, prompting me to turn around and push the ghostly creature away from me, so that I would be free to flee. She tumbled backwards, letting go of me, hitting her back against the table and screaming out in pain before finally falling to the floor. I hesitated, as I could hear faint crying as she writhed besides the table, but the ever growing sounds from deep in the hallway forced me to jump out the window and run in a mad dash without looking back. I had to make my way back into town and pack up immediately! I had go as far away from here as possible.

Running away from the estate was an all too familiar experience, the

only exception being that now I knew deep down in the pit of my stomach that they would indeed come after me, that they would hunt me down for breaking a possession of theirs and hurting a member of their family. They were coming after me, I knew it, like a pack of wild wolves of the fountain base. I could not stop, not even more a moment. My doom was fast approaching, as steady as that infernal sound that thundered inside my head. Yet now, the sound, together with my primal fear, kept all my senses sharp and focused, keeping me more alert than I have ever been in my life. I could clearly see the path in front of me despite the night's veil.

I made it back to the gate and from there I kept on running back to the city. There, the festival carried on, grander and louder than in the previous nights. It was most likely reaching its grand culmination, as most of the people seemed to be gathering in the town square, which I had to pass on my way to the hostel. I had not seen my partner or our friends anywhere on the way, nor in our room, but I could not stop, I could not wait or go looking for them, I was focused solely on grabbing my bag and getting out of this town before the wolves come looking for me.

Having carelessly stuffed all my things in the bag, I put it over my shoulder and ran back outside. I made my way towards the main road into town before I realized that this was the road that would lead me past that hidden path. Going this 52

way would most likely put me on a direct collision course with the wolves. I had to find another way, so I frantically darted from person to person, demanding, pleading, begging they tell me of another way out of town. Most looked dismayed, horrified by my appearance and the sheer terror that was most likely coming off of me in waves, scaring the people to try and get away from me as fast as possible without answering, though some even laughed at me mockingly. Who was I but some killjoy interrupting everyone's merriment?

At last, some person from a small group told me, looking at me with a disturbed expression, that there was a smaller road that goes in a completely different direction out of town, though they didn't know exactly where it may lead. They pointed me towards its general direction and I immediately took to running again. The noises of the festival, the sounds of joy, the music, had all blended into a cacophony that was overlaid with the thunderous booming of the accursed sound.

I felt like a fish swimming upstream, trying to escape from the city while everyone else was in my way, going towards the town square.

Finally I got to the road that I was told about and continued running as it led me uphill. The cacophony died down somewhere behind me, though the sound continued to erupt in my head, louder and louder, as if the world itself was about to shatter. In fact, the last beat I heard did sound like the world was ending. I suddenly stopped and turned to look behind me from atop the hill over which the road lead me. The last sound I heard was real, louder and more powerful than any thunderstorm. Some distance away and below me I could see the whole town, shining bright with festive lights... and a large fireball dispersing above what I assumed to be the town square. The town was burning. A terrible fire was spread-ing from the direction of the main road, towards the square where the thunderous noise had emanated from. I could now hear all the way from where I was the screams of horror and powerful rapid noises, as if a great many hammers were at work.

I stood paralyzed, for I had thought they would only come looking for me alone - how could I have known that they would unleash their fury upon the whole town? Or perhaps, I should have known. I was the only person alive who could have known, for the wolves told me exactly how much they loathed our kind. It was all my fault, had I not come back to their den, I would not have doomed all those unsuspecting people to this cosmic horror. I realize this now, I am responsible for this! Maybe I should have gone back and given myself up to stop their rampage, but I dared not, for the sound, having temporarily died down after the explosion, was back again, beckoning for me to keep running, foretelling my approaching demise. So I turned my back on that vision of car-nage for which I bear sole responsibility, and ran.

Chapter 8

This Journal

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CHAPTER 8. THIS JOURNAL

This is the only record in existence which reveals the truth behind the destruction of the town and the total eradication of all its inhabitants and travelers who stayed in it that night, as well of the full nature of the ultimate horror that had committed this massacre.

I have never stopped running since then, using every moment of relative safety when I could rest to fill its pages with my account of the events. I traveled between settlements, other towns and a couple of big cities, where I heard news about the mysterious and terrible massacre that befell that town, leaving no survivors and no clues as to what have happened. Worse still, I heard rumors of mysterious black-clad strangers occasionally appearing in nearby settlements, prowl-ing, looking for something or someone. I dared not tell anyone that I was there and could reveal the truth, for yet again I faced that awful prospect: who would believe me? They'd sooner arrest me to investigate if I could have been the cul-prit behind the massacre, and while I do admit that it was because of my actions that so many people lost their lives, I was not the person to literally kill them and set the town aflame. Moreover, if I were to be detained and news about me to travel around, the wolves would surely find out and come for me, leading to more death and destruction.

When I initially started putting down the record of my journey in this journal, I did not known for what purpose I did so. But as I have written earlier in here, perhaps whoever finds and reads it will figure out what, if anything, can be done.

The reason I chose to write it all down in the old language I learned at my University was not only so I could keep on writing this record privately while in plain sight,without fear of anyone looking over my shoulder and realizing that I may be a survivor of the massacre, but also because I feared the possibility that any regular person would think this to either be some crazed ramblings or a work of fiction, inspired by the massacre. Yet it is my desperate hope that if you can read this journal, then you are just like me, someone who shares a common interest with me, a common pursuit, in which case you might be more inclined to believe me.

That sound keeps haunting me still. Only when I busy myself writing in this journal does it subside and leave me be. Thus I had taken to write in it every night before going to sleep, as the sound would otherwise keep me awake, driving me to the brink of sanity. In fact, now that I am coming to the end of my record, I fear what may happen after I hide the journal. I will most certainly finally succumb to madness, unless the wolves finally catch up with me. I do not know which fate may in fact be worse, but once I have stashed this, I will keep on running, from both them and that sound, until my last dying breath.

Hopefuly when you discover this journal it won't be next to the place of my demise, with the wolves possibly still near it, or near the spot where my sanity had finally been broken, in which case I may very well become dangerous. Hopefuly, you heeded the warning I provided at the start of my account, not to linger wherever it was where you had discovered my journal.

The following will most likely be my final entry on these pages as I want to mention what little else was left unsaid, afterwards I will succumb to sleep and attempt to find a hiding place for this in the morning. As I wrote this I kept rewinding certain events in my mind and analyzing what had happened, what was revealed to me, and what had been said.

The old language in which I am writing this turned out to have more secrets than even we today are aware of, that much has been revealed by the host. Yet some words that I had heard could very well have been of the dead tongue of the tome. I will never discover the truth behind these words, though it is my sincere hope that you may succeed in my stead.

The ghoulish monster that had been the most displeased with my presence in their den had used some word to describe me, which I've come to suspect to be their word for our kind, that word into which he put all his hatred as he shouted

"what is this 'meeshleeng' doing here?"

I never figured out any of the mysteries behind the insidious device which has infected my mind with the seed of madness, but I did learn its name from the ghostly apparition that I had shoved down to the floor soon thereafter - she called it a “klok”.

The final mystery is constituted by the words and hieroglyphs I observed on the pages of the ancient tome in the wolf’s estate. I can still recall them perfectly, but could not understand or solve their meaning: “Mein Kampf, 2016”.